

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY

BOZEMAN | BILLINGS | NORTHERN | GREAT FALLS COLLEGE

CAMPUS REPORT | Board of Regents Meeting | March 11-12, 2021



MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY BILLINGS

- **Sue Balter-Reitz named Interim Provost & Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs of MSU Billings.** MSUB Professor of Communications, Susan Balter-Reitz, Ph.D., has been named Interim Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs following the move of former Provost Melinda Arnold to a similar position in Texas. Balter-Reitz started her interim role on Jan. 4, 2021 and will conclude after a search for a permanent Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs is complete. Balter-Reitz has held various positions at MSU Billings during her 18-year tenure, including Interim Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Director of eLearning, Chair of the Department of Communication, and Director of Graduate Studies.
- **MSUB student Justin Pallo launches Spanish story time.** Student Justin Pallo took his bilingual ability and brought positivity to the Billings community through his volunteer service at Billings Public Library. Justin has been volunteering at the Billings Public Library reading children's books in Spanish after connecting to the library through [MSUB's Virtual Volunteer](#) program. Since the library has been closed due to COVID-19, he has been recording and uploading videos to the library's [YouTube page](#) which is accessible to interested viewers.
- **Montana Department of Labor and Industry & MSUB form "Become an Alum" partnership.** The Become an Alum (BAA) program has partnered with MSUB and City College. The BAA program works with former MUS students who left school before attaining a degree or credential to help them return to college with personalized guidance, support, and resources. The program also connects employers who are seeking employees in their career field with individuals interested in pursuing education and training opportunities that give them the skills needed to fill in-demand jobs.
- **MSUB test pilots contact tracing app for Yellowstone County Health Department.** RiverStone Health launched an information system allowing people who are sick or who have been exposed to COVID-19 to voluntarily track and report their symptoms and recovery through a mobile app called the Sara Alert Information System. The app relies on people to voluntarily enroll and record their symptoms daily by text, email, or phone. This allows case investigators to focus on high-risk and non-reporting individuals. The Sara Alert system will help increase efficiency in tracking cases, which will lead to earlier containment of the virus and a reduction of burden on public health resources. Sara Alert is supported by the CDC and is used in other states and in some Montana communities. MSUB was the test pilot for the Sara Alert app in Billings and started successfully using it mid-November.
- **St. John's United Awards MSUB COVID-19 Research Grant.** MSUB was awarded this grant to establish the Montana Pooled & Environmental Testing Laboratory in the interest of enhancing surveillance protocols for COVID-19. The project is led by MSUB Associate Professor of Biochemistry Dan Willems. The partnership will utilize St. John's United's new state of the art Real-Time Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction testing lab (RT-PCR) located in downtown Billings.
- **MSUB uses Incident Command Structure (ICS) to guide COVID-19 response.** MSUB successfully navigated the pandemic last fall by forming a COVID-19 Incident Command team using the ICS, which is used on the local, state, and national levels to quickly mobilize and respond to emergencies. MSUB's COVID-19 Incident Command is a team-based, campus-wide system for problem solving and situation response, instead of the burden falling on a few individuals or departments. The primary goal, to keep students on campus and hold in-person classes all semester, was met.
- **MSUB HEROES receive national award.** MSUB peer education group, [HEROES](#), received the Outstanding Peer Education Group Award at the NASPA 2020 Virtual General Assembly. HEROES was one of three university outreach groups to receive the award. It recognizes peer education groups who have done excellent work by providing consistent health and safety resources within their campus. [NASPA](#) highlighted the outstanding work by HEROES in transitioning events and resources virtually, using social media as an educational platform, and creating online health courses.
- **MSUB professor awarded grant to assess water issues on reservations.** Assistant Professor Joseph Hoover received a five-year research grant for his research as co-director of National Institutes of Health Center of Excellence in Environmental Health Disparities at the University of New Mexico, where he will oversee research with Apsáalooke (Montana) and Cheyenne River Sioux (South Dakota) communities. He will lead a research project examining livestock grazing patterns and chemical exposures in the Navajo Nation. Hoover is also working on a separate grant with colleagues from other higher education institutions, where he is investigating the risk of factors for COVID-19 infections within Navajo communities.
- **MSUB professor and student play integral role in anthology publication.** English Professor Bernard Quetchenbach co-edited a recently published anthology *Poetics for More-than-Human World* alongside English professor Sarah Nolan from the University of Colorado and professor and writer Mary Newell. MSUB English major and student Brie Barron was also involved in the publication. Brie is currently producing an online journal called *FeverDream Magazine* while maintaining a full academic schedule, job, and parenting.